

# The Trompette

*The Newsletter of the Westchester Chapter of the American Guild of Organists*

AUGUST, 2010

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## *From the Dean's Bench*

Hi Everyone!

How is your July going? Don't you wish you could practice by the pool? The article this month by Sub-Dean Judy Abel about the National Convention in Washington, DC will make you wish you had been there! We had a wonderful time, and if there is anything to add, we'll write it up for the August *Trompette*. But seriously, David Higgs should not cross the street by himself; he is a national treasure.

While resisting the impulse to rave about the convention, I can share other summer experiences. In early June my family took a trip to Greece. The first day we spent wandering around Athens, and found ourselves at one point listening to Greek Orthodox chant in a 12<sup>th</sup> century church, opposite to which were political parties expressing their views also musically by means of recordings on loudspeakers. It was an interesting experience, but I really loved the three singing priests, elderly, middle-aged, and almost teen-aged, hovering over a big book of chants and letting it rip! The singing was good and enthusiastic. I'll take enthusiasm in a choir over anything else!

Here are the results of a last-minute poll question: "*What do you like best about playing the organ?*"

**Joyce Gardner:** "I love all the different sounds you can get on the organ; also the feeling of power when one plays *fff*."

**Alice Avouris:** "Playing the organ makes me feel close to my mother, who was still taking lessons in her 80's. I also feel close to Bach and church-musician ancestors."

**Janine Thwaite:** "My favorite experience involving the organ is when the congregation is singing a "big hymn" and I can use full stops on the last verse. The entire building shakes and I can feel the vibrations in my own body - it is the breath and voice of Spirit."

**Tim Keenan-Devlin:** "My favorite thing about playing the organ is it's a special gift to be able to play it, with everything you can do with it and the sounds you can make, to touch people with its beauty and make them enthused and happy. For me, playing the organ soothes and structures my life and my soul."

*(continued on next page)*

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**Bob Chase:** "I still play the organ and continue to learn new pieces, as well as dust off the older, long-ago learned works. *Vis-a-vis* technique, you know the old axiom: If you don't use it, you lose it. One of my long-ago teachers, George Faxon, actually said on his death bed that he wished he had practiced more. This came from an individual who practiced uncountable hours. He could play anything. I just heard a recording of the Trinity Church (Faxon's church in Boston) Aeolian-Skinner with its magnificent tone quality and enormous power. It was a reminder of the reason why I took up the organ."



and . . . "What did you play on July 4<sup>th</sup>?"

**Joyce Gardner:** "I played Variations on "America" by one of my teachers, David N. Johnson, and for the postlude, the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" arranged by Alice Jordan. Both are fun, and not too hard."

**Alice Avouris:** "I used "God Bless America" as the opening hymn. Everyone in the congregation channeled Ethel Merman."

**John Cecconi:** "Last Christmas my sister sent me a book entitled "Presidential Praise," a compendium and commentary of the favorite hymns of each of the Presidents from Washington to George W. Bush. I didn't have a chance to put this together for President's Day weekend, but since July 4<sup>th</sup> landed on a Sunday, the service music I played was:

Prelude: Medley of 5 presidential favorites

Hymn of Worship: "America the Beautiful" (Harry Truman)

Hymn of Prayer: "What a Friend We Have In Jesus" (Dwight Eisenhower)

Anthem: "God Bless America" - I played and sang the verse, my Angelica Choir sang the chorus.

Offertory: "Eternal Father, Strong To Save" (The Navy Hymn; George H. W. Bush)

Closing Hymn: "Onward Christian Soldiers" (Lyndon Johnson)

It was quite well-received."

**Tim Keenan-Devlin:** "My music for Fourth of July was Robert Hughes' "America the Beautiful." We sing "God Bless America" or "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Lastly, **Ken Potter** showed me what he played for a July 4<sup>th</sup> postlude while we were sitting waiting for a Children's Service to begin at the convention. He recorded it on his cell-phone – the Sousa March "Liberty Bell" which was the Monty Python show theme song! I'll bet the congregation loved it.

Bye for now,

*Alice Avouris*

# Reads & Mixtures

**Please welcome the following new members:**

Terrence J. Flanagan

Interim Music Director: The Presbyterian Church of Mount Kisco

Noriko Yamada

Jason Rodovsky-Enquist

Senior Editor: Transcontinental Music Publications

Organist: Larchmont Temple

## **Report from Washington, DC Convention by Judy Abel**

Alice and I arrived at the beautifully landscaped Marriott Wardman Park Hotel after lunch, in time to catch a bit of the 1:30 workshops. (Doug Kostner, John King, or Jayson Enquist may be able to report on the opening convocation and morning concerts.) I had picked workshops I thought would specifically give me ideas I could use in my job. I wasn't disappointed.

My first, "Global Music Performance: Effective Song Leading" given by Michael Hawn, gave me performance experience with a cheerful, infectious African Gloria. My next, "Sacred Music from Latin America" given by Diana Saez, was brimful of inspiration. Outstanding for me was a simple motet in the Incan language, published in Peru in 1631. Can anyone cite a piece of music published in the Americas before that date?

For Vespers, I chose the Taizé Service at St. Thomas the Apostle Roman Catholic Church. The sanctuary, as I remember it, was quite plain, the walls white, suitable for this supremely meditative service. With hundreds of fellow musicians, I got to

sing songs I had not known before, in authentic Taizé repetitive style, and experience its almost trance-evoking effect.

Supper was, I kid you not, the best sushi I have ever eaten at a small bistro across the street from the hotel.

The concert that night was mind-boggling. The National Cathedral was jam-packed with audience. Samuel Barber's *Toccata Festiva, Op. 36*, performed by Scott Dettra, Cathedral organist, and the 25-member Cathedral Orchestra, filled the hall to the rafters with impressive sound. Especially dazzling was the lengthy "look ma, no hands" passage for pedals alone. The featured choral/orchestral work was "*Mass for the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Death of Joan of Arc*" by the Frenchman Paul Paray. The stunning, shimmering beauty of the music and the perfection of the soloists' vocal delivery made this a memorable highlight of the convention, to say nothing of the story behind the music, its historical significance, and its expression of (in the composer's words) "the universality of the Scriptures."

For Tuesday morning's concerts, I chose Diane Belcher's recital first. She played at the Church of the Ascension and Saint Agnes, which dates from the 1840's, on the Letourneau organ especially designed for Anglo-Catholic liturgy. Her program included a voluntary by William Russell, the *Six Fugues on the Name B-A-C-H, Op. 60* by Robert Schumann, and *Plymouth Suite* by Percy Whitlock. An unfortunate cipher towards the end of the Schumann did not deter her. She finished in style!

Next, I went to the Choral Concert by the Woodley Ensemble at The Cathedral of Saint Mathew the Apostle (where John F. Kennedy's funeral Mass was held). I heard a fascinating montage of contemporary works, each from a different country of the world, some performed a cappella, some with organ accompaniment. The director was Frank Albinder, formerly a singer and director with the internationally renowned male vocal ensemble *Chanticleer*. (The organist sitting next to me proudly informed me he had taught Frank at the New England Conservatory of Music.) Of particular interest was the setting of the lineage of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke, the "begats", by the Estonian Arvo Part. By his technique of "tintinnabulation", using an unexpected text, he created a unique piece of aural art I will always remember. The offering from the United States was the commissioned work by Leo Nestor, "*Joy! Because the Circling Year*". This was settings of three excerpts from the ancient *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, sequence for Pentecost, interspersed with *Beata nobis gaudia anni reduxit orbita*, the hymn at Lauds on Pentecost. An exceptional organist is required for this piece, but the chorus parts are almost all unison and within easy range. I would like to hear this piece again.

In the afternoon my first stop was to see what I could learn about arranging for Brass and Organ, with none other than Phil Snedecor (formerly with the Canadian Brass), founder of the Washington Symphonic Brass, as the teacher. He shared many tidbits of technical information, all of which I believe I can use.

Second, I enjoyed a sampling of a wide variety of easy organ repertoire from tried and true sources, played by Vicki Schaeffer of the University of Oklahoma. She

interjected many entertaining anecdotes from her experience of having to play seventeen chapel services per week.

That night, the entire convention was bussed to Annapolis for another spectacular highlight. The excitement started with watching wave upon wave of white-uniformed midshipmen marching across the campus, in companies, to supper. The sight (up to 4,000 young, good-looking men and women were marching in precise formation, every single one carrying their neatly-folded next-day's uniform in exactly the same way, every eye at attention) filled me with awe and pride. Inside the chapel, more awe-inspiring sights awaited. Here's only one example: at the rear of the hall, in front of the balcony organ and the majestic trumpet pipes, a quite large-scale model of a sailing ship is suspended from the ceiling. I found a seat in a side balcony midway between the main organ in front center and the antiphonal organ in back. I took pictures, but none of them do the place justice. David Higgs, chair of the organ department at Eastman School of Music, put together a thoroughly enjoyable concert on the recently expanded and renovated Möller organ. Everything was superb, from *Variations de Concert* by Joseph Bonnet, to "What a Friend We Have In Jesus" in gospel style by William Bolcom, to J.S. Bach's *Passacaglia in C Minor* (in which he showcased a variety of stops and used the antiphonal organ), to the commissioned work, *Sanctuary* by Gwyneth Walker (a really lovely set of three pastoral pieces), to his breath-taking rendition of Widor's *Symphony VI in G Minor, Op. 42*. He topped off the evening with an encore, "In a Persian Market". Who would have thought we'd hear a theater organ in that august setting?

Leaving the chapel, I saw Elizabeth Sullivan, former Board member of our chapter, who now lives in Illinois. We had a wonderful chat during the bus ride back to the hotel.

Wednesday morning, after the Annual Meeting and breakfast, I attended the Roman Catholic Morning Prayer service at St. Patrick's. The curved white wall, slashed with long, thin stained glass windows in pastel colors, made a lovely, peaceful background for the 11-voice choir. The singing of the hymns and psalms was a cappella, with the organ providing improvisations on the antiphons and playing some stanzas as solos. Each psalm had a slightly different pattern of alternation between choir, assembly, and cantor, or between men and women. From there it was a long walk to Shiloh Baptist Church, but was it ever worth the walk! The Senior Choir and professional musicians had prepared a blow-out worship service, complete with chamber orchestra, three trumpets, and tympani. The music was all by African-American composers, but in classical style, not gospel or jazz. Most outstanding for me was "The Song and the Dance", based on a traditional African-American spiritual "O Glory", arranged by Evelyn Simpson-Currenton.

On my way to The French Tradition of Organ Improvisation, I bumped into Doug Kostner and his wife in a corner café. After lunch they went to a workshop at the hotel and I went to hear Jean-Baptiste Robin demonstrate how perfect chords on all the tones of a classical mode, played under a motif or tune, will produce very

satisfying improvisation. From that fairly simple beginning he went into transposition of modes, chords with added notes, other modes, producing ever more complicated improvisations. At the end he said “Now, go home and practice and good luck!”

Two recitals completed the afternoon. First, I heard the young Canadian virtuoso, Isabelle Demers. Especially impressive were *Prelude* and *Toccata* from *First Symphony* by Rachel Laurin (of Montreal), composed in 2002. Second, I joined Alice (in the front row!) to hear Faythe Freese of the University of Alabama. Dr. Freese kept us spell-bound every moment with her meticulous renditions of Distler’s *Partita on “Wachet auf”* and Sowerby’s *Air with Variations*. A commissioned work, *Sojourn*, by Craig Phillips, for organ and woodwind soloists, truly delighted the ear. Her *piece de resistance* was the one she commissioned from Naji Hakim in 2009, “*To Call My True Love to My Dance*”. It consisted of ten variations on a little Danish song from a church program called “*Singing Hymns for Babies*”. That simple, delightful melody came alive in ever more fascinating dance forms, building to a fiery finale. The standing ovation was long and richly-deserved.

We had to leave to come home the next morning. (Doug, John, and Jayson may be able to report on Thursday’s events and the closing concert.) Before our departure, there was time for one last treat: a visit to the surprising gardens and Italian Baroque style buildings of The Mount St. Sepulchre Franciscan Monastery. Matthew Glandorf and an outstanding vocal ensemble called “The Six” (all from Philadelphia) presented a totally exquisite program of Solemn Tone Plainsong (*Te Deum laudamus*), chorale preludes on *Kyrie*, *Gott Vater*, a fantasia and fugue on *Magnificat tonus peregrinus*, and an improvisation on “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded.” The choral singing was alternated with organ improvisation, for which Mr. Glandorf had on his music rack only the tune. There aren’t enough superlatives to describe the musical effects we enjoyed in that glorious sanctuary. The next National Convention will be on a smaller scale, in the city of Nashville. I hope to see you there!

Respectfully submitted,

*Judy Abel*

**No Empty Benches have been reported.**

**No Concert Notices has been submitted.**

## **SUBSTITUTE LIST AS OF July 2010**

Judith Abel (weekday & Sunday weddings, funerals)  
Dorothy Beach  
Carolyn Karlsrud (winter months only)  
Virginia Bender  
Michael Goodman (Christian & Jewish)  
Owen Borda  
Marilyn Ballantine  
Eileen Laurence (Saturdays, Christian & Jewish)  
Richard Piluso (Catholic services)  
Margaret Kim  
Deborah Jones-Norberto  
Nancy Hastings (Saturdays, Protestant or Catholic)  
Timothy Keenan.Devlin (Catholic weddings, funerals,& Saturday-night Masses)  
John Dominick  
Jayson-Rodevsky-Enquist (Sunday mornings)

Note: If you would like your name to be added or subtracted from this list, please contact Judy Abel.

## FROM YOUR NEWSPAPER EDITORS...

Thank you all for your cooperation in getting your material **TO US** by the **20<sup>th</sup> of each preceding month**. We want to be able to deliver the Newsletter to you on or about the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month, and it takes a week or more to finalize the copy and layout, get it to and from the printer, and address, stamp and mail all of the copies.

*The Trompette* is sent out by email, and by regular mail to those Members without an email address. The electronic versions are sent out immediately after finalization, but processing the printed copies can take a week or more, plus the delivery of the regular postal mail can additionally take a week or more. If you have an email address, but are presently receiving your copy by postal mail, consider receiving it electronically instead, saving the Chapter postage expense. Send your email address to:

Kindly do not send in items more than once. For the Concert Calendar, include event, date, time, location, cost (if any) and an information phone number. (Incomplete or unclear submissions cannot be printed.) Due to space constraints, articles and notices are edited.

**If you have provided a notice for the “Empty Benches” section, please be advised that postings will be carried for 3 calendar months unless we are advised that the position has either been filled or is still active. Newest listings appear first. Listings carried more than one month will be arranged alphabetically by organization and will indicate the month they were first run. We appreciate your cooperation in keeping *The Trompette* accurate and up.to.date.**

Send your concert notices, articles, and other materials to:

E.mail: (preferable): (Compose in MS Word, if possible)

Postal Mail: T. Zachacz, *The Trompette*,

The Dean and the Executive Board encourage our Members to send informative articles and any other items of interest for publication in the Newsletter.

**Thank you!**

*Lois Simmonds & Thomas Zachacz*

Editors,

*The Trompette*



*Here is the LATEST issue of the  
Westchester Chapter AGO Newsletter.....*

*Inside:*

*Welcome to our Newest Members; Review of the National  
Convention by Judy Abel; and yes, another Substitute List.*

Westchester Chapter of the American Guild of Organists

*The Trompette*

Lois Simmonds &

Thomas Zachacz, Editors